

The Monster Within

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Summary: First fox on the force and desperate to prove himself, Rookie cop Nick Wilde has 48 hours to find the missing Emmet Otterton. When he realizes that he can't do it alone, he has to get help from the most notorious mercenary in Zootopia: Judy Hopps. (role-reversal AU)

1. Prologue

Prologue

She was so proud.

She'd scraped and saved and worked, and him along with her, and finally, she was able to buy him a uniform.

The young red fox looked at himself in the cracked mirror, puffed out his chest, straightened his hat, and collapsed in a fit of giggles when his mother tickled him.

He wanted nothing more than to be a Junior Ranger Scout. And it didn't matter that he was going to be the only predator there, because by god he was going to fit in.

He could hardly wait. His feet were springs, jumping up and down and up and down until the clock chimed 6. As soon as that bong resonated throughout the little apartment, he kissed his mother on the snout and ran out the door.

She was so proud of her little boy.

He nearly overshot the building, he was so excited. Two at a time, he skipped up the stairs, and arrived in a room with the other scout members. He high-fived a zebra and beamed brightly at a beaver, the largest of the animals.

"Ready?"

He scoffed. "I was pretty much born ready."

The lights dimmed, and a bright light illuminated his face.

"Recite the oath," The beaver said in a mystical voice.

"I, Nicholas P. Wilde, promise to be kind, loyal, helpful, and trustworthy," He recited without hesitation.

"Even though you're a FOX?"

"Huh?"

The light shut, and the beaver pushed him down. He landed with a cry as two others, he couldn't see through his fear, held him down. The beaver pressed something down onto his snout.

"No! No! Please! What did I do? What did I do!" He screamed, but they didn't care. The muzzle snapped on, its cold metal pressing up against his fur. He squirmed again, but they held him down hard.

"You thought we would ever trust a fox without a muzzle? You're even dumber than you look." The words tore at his heart, hurt him more than any punch ever could. Desperately, he clawed in the dark, heard a cry, felt their grip loosen and sprinted away as fast as his paws could carry him.

He heard them laughing cruelly behind him, and one of them called out, "Did you ever think we could trust a FOX?" and burst out laughing like it was the funniest thing in the world.

He flattened himself against the wall, their laughs echoing in his head. He'd lost his hat, and his uniform was torn. A tear slid down his cheek, then another, and soon he was crying, crying to forget, crying to remember.

The horrible muzzle suffocated him. Black spots danced at the edge of his vision, and he fought to pry the horrible strap off. It slipped over his ears, and he threw that horrible thing away, far away from him. It landed with a clatter near a sewer grate, and he willed it to fall in.

I promise, _he thought between hiccups and sobs, _I promise no one will _ever _treat me like that again. I promise to be kind, loyal, helpful, and trustworthy. I promise that I'll be the best, the nicest, the _most _trustworthy animal in Zootopia. They'll like me. I'll make them like me. I'll never be a sneaky sly fox, and everyone will know, and then they'll see how wrong they are._

The red and blue lights of a passing police car startled him out of his trance, but in no time at all, he was mesmerized by it. He wiped a paw across his cheek and straightened his bandana. His eyes, though still brimming with tears, were filled with something new, something bold.

Hope.

Being a police officer would bring him that much closer.

2. Chapter 1

5:30.

The alarm sounded like a swarm of mosquitos buzzing in his ear. He swatted at it, and the alarm clock just fell to the ground and continued ringing.

Suddenly, he snapped wide awake. He looked around his cramped little apartment, so different with its thin cot and painted walls, and remembered where he was.

Savannah Central, the heart of Zootopia.

The fox jumped up, jumped over his annoying clock, and got dressed in a matter of minutes. The uniform fit snugly over his fur, and he straightened out his badge proudly. He looked at himself in the mirror, puffed out his chest, straightened his hat, and laughed. His voice was so much deeper than before. It took him 23 years, but he finally got here.

He wished his mother was here. He wanted to thank her, for all her support over the years, butâ€¦

He refocused his gaze. Today was about new beginnings, not grim realities.

Without thinking, he reached for his tail to hide it, and stopped himself. He's a fox. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

Still it's a hard mentality to overcome, but he ended up leaving his tail free. It felt unnaturally bare, the fur swaying gently in the cold draft.

5:35. Beep beep beep.

He growled and stomped over to the alarm clock to turn it off. Then, he grabbed his phone and keys and raced out the door.

He had to remind himself to come back and get his sunglasses.

* * *

><p>Sahara Central was blisteringly hot. He still had to shield his eyes, even through the thick sunglasses. He tried to ignore the dirty glares he got, and the wide berth animals gave him as they walked. Nervously, he reached for his tail again, and had to stab himself with his badge pin to remind himself not to.</p>

It didn't end when he got to work. Sure, the cheetah at the front desk was very friendlyâ€¦

"O-M-Goodness. They really did hire a fox. What! You're even more handsome than I imagined!"

He blinked. "Um. Thanks?" He felt the urge to hide his tail again, but settled for holding out his paw for a handshake. The table was

taller than he was, and he had to reach up. "I'm Nick Wilde, new to the force. And you must be?"

The cheetah sighed. "Me, Benjamin Clawhauser. The guy that everyone thinks is just a flabby, donut loving cop, stereotyping you."

He chuckled. "Yeah, it's alright." He didn't even bother mentioning the donut caught in the cheetah's neck folds. "Soâ€ May I ask where the conference room is?"

Benjamin found the donut and happily chomped down on it. "Oh, bullpen's over there to the left," He mumbled. Nick thanked him politely and walked into the room. Still, his sensitive fox ears picked on Benjamin's quiet murmurs.

"Oh, that poor fox is gonna get eaten alive."

Nick's ear twitched, but otherwise, he hoped he didn't show any signs of hearing.

He took a spot in the front row, and nearly fell off the chair. It was twice his height, and he had to scramble up it rather indignantly.

When he finally got on it, he had to stand to see over.

The other animals in the room were all cheering and jostling each other. He longed to join in, but he knew that they wouldn't accept him, he would get hurt, or he might hurt someone.

Thinking logically has gotten him past the last lonely couple years, and it hasn't failed him yet.

A huge cape buffalo walked into the room. No, walked is too light of a word. Stomped into the room. The entire place fell silent. The buffalo had a presence, like you could sense he was someone of importance.

"Alright. I've got three items on the document," He said, his voice booming. "First, we need to acknowledge the elephant in the room."

Nick's heart nearly jumped out of his chest. Is he talking about me?_

"Francine, happy birthday."

The room erupted in chaos, but in the midst of it was happiness and acceptance. Francine reached over and tousled a tiger's head violently, but affectionately. The rhino beside him clapped awkwardly, and Nick could honestly say that he felt his pain.

"Number two: there is a new recruit among us I should introduce, but I'm not going to, because I don't care."

Nick stayed perfectly still while all the animals around him laughed. Don't draw attention, don't draw attention, don't draw attention. He chuckled, but it came out awkward and forced.

"Finally, we have fourteen missing mammal cases," He pointed a finger at a map on the wall. Tacked on it were pictures of animals. "All predators, from a giant polar bear, to a teensy otter. And city hall is right up my tail to find them. This is priority number one."

The Chief grabbed a stack of case files and began handing them out. "Officers Fangmeyer, McHorn, Francine!"

Nick waited patiently for his name to be called. He shifted uncomfortably; the chair was far too big for him, and he felt so small and insignificant in this world full of huge predators and prey. He didn't feel like a fox. He felt like an easy-to-squash bug.

Finally, the room was empty. He resisted the urge to look around in confusion.

"Officer Wilde! Parking duty. Dismissed."

There are no words to describe the expression of shock on Nick's face. He immediately jumped down from his chair and raised his paw in question.

"Um, sir? Did you say! Parking duty? Well, I, uh, as you know, I was at the top of my class," He said.

The buffalo turned around and put on glasses, making Nick feel even smaller than before. "I knew that. I just don't care."

He tried again. "There are 5 districts. I could take a case. The other officers are already spread thin, and â€" "

"Officer Wilde, you would do well to do what you are told."

"Sir, with all due respect, I'm not just some lazy fox."

The Chief took his glasses off and walked away. "Then giving 100 tickets today shouldn't be a problem for you, should it?" He called in passing.

"But, sir, aren't ticketing quotas illegal?" Nick asked, but the door swung back in his face and nearly crushed his foot. He sighed and smoothed back his hat. Wonderful.

Sorry for the slow start. You guys get to see Judy next chapter!

3. Chapter 2

The stupid reflective vest was chafing at his fur, and he looked like an orange traffic cone. Even though he was _so very kindly given _some sort of three-wheeled _jokemobile, _he parked it and chose to walk as soon as possible, and for good reason.

The weather was nice, but the sun was still too bright, and he longed for his dark, little fox towns and neighbourhoods.

A meter's tag switched to red. He looked around, but no one else was here. Hesitantly, he put a ticket on the car.

A meter down the block clicked, and he walked towards it. An elk came out of a nearby store with an armful of groceries, and Nick paused in his step.

"Would you like any help, miss?" He offered, but the elk turned rudely away and walked to the overtime car. Nick raced after her. "Miss, this time I can let you off with a warning, but your meter ran out of time just a few minutes ago, and â€œ"

"I have pepper spray. If you don't get away from me, I'll call the police," She hissed, and laboriously took out her car keys.

"Really, miss, I'm an officer. If you need help, you can always ask."

The elk guffawed. "You? A cop?" She shoved all her stuff in the backseat and snapped a picture of Nick.

"Hey, what?"

She typed rapidly on it and took out her can of pepper spray. "I have my finger on 911. If you don't leave, I'll report you for impersonating an officer and spray you."

Dejectedly, Nick put up his paws and backed slowly away. There were other expired meters on this block, but he backed way out of the way of the elk and walked onto another block.

He backed into a rhino and hastily excused himself. The rhino huffed and walked on, casting distrustful glances at Nick.

He began putting tickets on cars again, careful to wait at least a minute before even starting to write it. It's not anyone's fault if they're held up momentarily.

Suddenly, he halted. His head whipped around to see a rabbit strolling down the street, whistling softly. Abandoning all pretenses, he sprinted off and hid behind a trash can.

A rabbit.

I've never seen one before.

I heard they live in a part of the Burrowsâ€œ|

They rarely come out, don't they?

What's a cute little thing like her doing in a big bad city like Zootopia?

I shouldâ€œ| Talk to herâ€œ|

But what if she runs away?

His tail was waving side by side in wide arcs, and he could do little to stop it. The sound of meters expiring hit him in the head like a huge concession of failure: _click click click. Tick tock. Time is running out._

He stood up suddenly, smoothed down his uniform, and tried to stride naturally towards the rabbit. It felt robotic.

"Hi!" He called out, just a tad too far away for it to be natural. The rabbit smiled good-naturedly and closed the distance. "Do you happen to have the time?"

She smiled widely, showing two perfect rabbit teeth. "Let me check," She said happily, and reached for her phone. Carrot. Same as his. "It's 10:20," She told him.

He blinked a few times. "Um. Yeah. Okay. Thanks." He stayed just a second too long and winced inwardly, when she started talking again.

"Say, are you a police officer? What precinct are you in?" She asked, falling into stride beside him.

He was caught off guard. "Precinct one," He blurted out.

She nodded. "That must've been such a huge honor. You must really be an upstanding citizen, being the first fox on the force and all. Nick Wilde, right? You were on the news the other day."

He beamed, and sloppily stuck a ticket. "Yes. I â€“ I can't believe you recognized me."

"You're the only fox on the force," She said in a deadpan, but burst out laughing.

Nick nodded, but he was too busy staring up in dismay at a giraffe's car, several heads taller than he was. The meter was flashing red, red, red.

"Here, let me get that," The rabbit said, and snatched the waiting ticket in his paws. She wagged her tail and launched herself from the ground, bounced off a lamppost, an awning, trapped the ticket between the windshield wipers, and fell back down with an acrobatic flip.

"I give that a nine," She said. "The tumble was a bit off."

Nick just stared wide-eyed at this bunny. Who _was _she?

She looked back on her Carrot phone and smacked herself in the forehead. "Ugh! I lost track of time. Sorry, gotta bounce, pun intended!" She dashed off and rounded the corner before Nick could even think to say "bye."

Quite stunned by what happened, he busied himself with tickets.

Soon, though, he ran into her again. He thought about calling out to her, but didn't.

She was talking to a huge ram, but in his head, he was thinking, _you lay a hand on her, buddy, and you answer to the ZPD._

He watched silently as they finished talking, exchanged a handshake, and the ram handed her a briefcase. She gave him a solemn nod, so different from the perky, go-happy attitude she had just moments

ago.

Curious, he began following her.

He watched her go into a building near Sahara Square, a huge plaza full of shops and restaurants. He was about to turn around and leave when he saw her again, this time on the roof of that building.

With a mounting horror, he realized that she was setting up some sort of sniper contraption.

He immediately began running full tilt towards the building, but he knew he was too late when he heard the high pitched _zip _of a bullet flying through the air.

All hell broke loose.

A tiger, who was giving a speech on the stage, suddenly roared and charged, raking his razor-sharp claws across a passing sheep. The sheep fainted, clumps of wool missing, and Nick ran forward.

"Stop! ZPD!" He shouted, but the tiger didn't seem to hear. "HEY! Stop in the name of peace!"

He managed to get a young polar bear and a group of rodents to safety before the panic overpowered him. He covered his ears and frantically radioed for help.

The tiger heard it, turned around, and Nick's blood froze.

The last thing he remembered was the shrill, piercing wail of a siren.

4. Chapter 3

"Nick Wilde, to the chief's office," The voice came over the PA. He groaned inwardly, grabbed a neat stack of reports, and trudged to Bogo's office.

He walked past an otter and Clawhauser at the front desk. All his instincts told him to stop and help her, she looked so sad, but he needed to talk to the chief first.

He rapped silently on the door.

"Come in."

Tentatively, Nick pushed the door open and slipped in, closing it behind him. Chief Bogo had on his glasses, and was reading the *Zootopia Times* intently. With a sinking feeling, he saw Sahara square on the front page, underneath the headline "Attack by Feral Tiger!"

"You wanted to see me?" He said in a voice barely higher than a whisper.

Bogo pushed up his glasses. "Officer Wilde, I gave you the simplest, least dangerous job on the force. And what do you do?"

"Sir, I can explain, I â€“" He began.

"You abandon your post, endanger innocent citizens by neglecting protocol, chase after a dangerous felon armed with little more than your teeth and claws, leave your service vehicle alone and unguarded, but, in your defence, you did manage to apprehend the sniper." Bogo leaned closer to Nick. "No. No you didn't."

"I thought our job was to protect mammals at all costs!"

"And you didn't. You let the gunman get away."

"Gun_woman. _Sir, I tried. And I saw her face! I can identify her again! The whole point is that â€“"

Clawhauser cracked open the door. "Chief, Mrs. Otterton is here again about her husband."

"Not now!" Chief Bogo growled. He turned back to Nick. "The whole point is that you failed." He pinched the bridge of his nose. "Life isn't some cartoon musical where you sing a little song and all your dreams magically come true. _Trying_ doesn't cut it in the real world."

"I'm not saying that I want my dreams to come true! We have a real chance at capturing this rabbit and saving more citizens if you would just _trust me!_"

"The first time you encountered danger, you fainted and nearly got killed. What makes you think I'm willing to trust you again?"

Clawhauser came into the room again. "She really means it this time."

"Can't you see I'm in the middle of a meeting?"

Clawhauser began to back out again when a tiny little otter slinked past him and into the room.

"Please, Chief Bogo. Emmet's been missing for 3 days. He's a kind mammal. He never hurt anyone. We have young kids â€“ please."

"Ma'am, our detectives are very busy," Chief Bogo said awkwardly.

"Please, there's got to be somebody who can find my Emmet."

"Mrs. Otterton â€“"

"I will find him." The chief turned around to see Nick hopping down from his chair with a defiant look in his eyes.

"Oh, thank you! Bless you, bless you, officer fox," Mrs. Otterton cried. She ran forward and gave Nick a huge hug. The fox stiffened, before softening and returning it.

She wiped tears from her cheek and handed him a picture. It was a family photo of the Ottertons. Emmet was smiling and hugging his wife

in the foreground while their children played behind them. Nick's heart melted.

"Take this. Find my Emmet. Bring him home to me and my babies. Please."

Chief Bogo cleared his throat. "Mrs. Otterton, please wait out here." He directed her towards the door.

She cast another look back at Nick and gave him a warm smile. "Of course. Oh, thank you both so much."

"One second," Bogo said as he closed the door.

He closed his eyes and turned towards Nick slowly. "You're fired."

"What? Why?"

"INSUBORDINATION! Now, I'm going to open this door and you're going to tell that otter you're a former meter jockey with delusions of grandeur who will not be taking the case." Nick had his mouth wide open in protest, but the chief chose not to notice.

He opened the door, and saw the bouncing wool of a sheep.

"Assistant Mayor Bellwether!"

"So. Officer _Wilde_ is taking the case." She didn't sound particularly pleased. "I supposed the Mammal Inclusion Initiative is finally making progress."

"Yes, well â€"

She pulled him aside and out of earshot of Mrs. Otterton. "Are you sure you're going to trust the case to a _fox_?" She hissed, surprising him. She cleared her throat and put on a peppy face. "I mean, of course you are. Great. Seeing as how he bungled up that riot in Sahara Square the other day, I wouldn't be surprised if he falls in the line of duty, so to speak."

She walked back to the door, looking smug. Mrs. Otterton still looked extremely grateful, but Chief Bogo just had a change of heart.

He closed the door as close to Bellwether's face as possible and turned back to Nick. The fox was majorly ashamed, and looked like he was pruning his tail into nonexistence.

"You get 48 hours."

"Wait, what?"

Chief Bogo put his hand over his eyes. "Oh, I can't stand that sheep. Always interfering with my officers and my plans and my operations," He muttered.

Nick looked hopeful.

"48 hours to find Emmet Otterton. You strike out, you resign."

Nick's heart was pounding in his chest. Potentially help a very nice otter and her kids find her husband and prove himself, or not take the case and get stuck as a meter jockey for the rest of his life?

"Deal."

They shook on it.

* * *

><p>"Here you go. One missing otter." Clawhauser passed him a case file. His tail flew through the air and smacked Nick in the face.<p>

"Benj â€“"

_Smack. _"What was that?" The cheetah asked, turning around.

Nick batted the tail away from his face. It was surprisingly stiff. "Just â€“ nothing."

"Okay." _Smack. _He sat back down and started drinking a bottle of sode.

Nick fumed and picked up the file. It was really _really _small.

He opened it.

Clawhauser guffawed. "Whoa! That's the smallest case file I've ever seen! Evidence: none. Witnesses: none. And resources: none, because you're not in the system yet! Ha! Hope you didn't bet your whole career on this."

Nick gulped and pretended to look intently at the photo beneath the meager information. The time stamp told him it was taken just a week ago.

Emmet Otterton was walking and waving to someone. Still, even squinting his eyes, he couldn't see who it was. Handily, he snatched Clawhauser's empty soda bottle that he was slurping annoyingly on, and used it as a magnifying glass.

From behind a mailbox, he saw just the tip of a pair of ears poking out. Darker tipped, with grey fur. His eyes narrowed.

Not that he's seen many rabbits, but he swore there was only one rabbit in Zootopia, along that one particular streetâ€|

5. Chapter 4

He ran into her that same day, after walking up and down that street a few dozen times. Finally, he saw that same rabbit walking along the street, wearing jeans and a pink flannel shirt, whistling softly.

He walked up to her and nearly bumped into a group of beavers repaving the road. He stepped nimbly around them, marveling at their unbelievable teeth, and caught up to her.

"Hi. Remember me? Officer Wilde, ZPD."

She turned around innocently. "Is there something wrong, officer?"

Somehow, that set him off. Does she not feel sorry? She could have hurt so many innocent mammals in that square!

He clenched his teeth and swallowed his words. "Miss, I have some questions about a case."

"Oh! Yeah! Sure!" She replied perkily, bouncing on her toes.

He blinked a few times. "Um. Okay." He looked down on his notepad. There was literally only one question, scribbled hastily using Clawhauser's pink pen: WHERE IS EMMET OTTERTON?

He rubbed the back of his neck and stared at the page. "So, um, what's your name?" He asked sheepishly.

"Judy Hopps, of Bunnyburrow. You might have heard of the Hopps farms?" She stuck out her paw to shake, and he took it.

He nodded. "Your blueberries are really good," He blurted out. He could've smacked himself. Case, case, case. Stay on the case. You only have 48 hours, and none of them should be spent chatting with a sniper.

She blushed and smiled.

He cleared his throat and looked at the useless notepad again. "One week ago today, you were walking down this same street, correct?"

She nodded enthusiastically.

He was taken back. Why is she HELPING me?

"Did you happen to see an otter by the name of Emmet Otterton?"

She nodded again. Her ears flapped every time she nodded, as if she was about to use them as wings and fly away. "I pass by him every day." Almost as an afterthought, she added, "I haven't seen him this last week though."

"So do you know where he is?" A spark of hope ignited in him. Maybe she does have information!

She shook her head sadly. "Sorry. But I do know where he went the last day I saw him, though."

This is farther than I thought I'd get.

"Can you take me there?"

She thought about it for a second, then nodded again.

She turned tail and started walking the other direction, motioning for Nick to follow. He raced over, even while everyone around them

cast him dirty looks. Judy didn't seem to notice. She kept skipping forwardly, happily as ever. He found himself wondering how someone so happy and chipper could be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

That was it. He couldn't hold the question back anymore. It had been burning in the back of his mind the entire time he was talking to her.

"What were you doing on the roof of that building during the day of the Sahara Square attack?" He demanded.

"What do you mean?" She asked lightheartedly.

"I saw you setting up a sniper stand!"

Her ears shot up in alarm, and her paws flew to her mouth. Her big violet eyes started tearing up, and before he knew it, she was full out crying.

"You mean you think I shot that tiger in Sahara Square?" She asked just a little louder than it needed to be. Heads began turning.

"You're so mean and horrible! I would never do that!" She cried.

To him, it seemed like her IQ dropped thirty degrees.

To everyone around them, it seemed like a fox just threatened an innocent rabbit.

"Hey! Whad'ya think you're doin'?" A hippo bellowed.

"Yeah! Did you hurt her?" A zebra joined in.

Before long, they were surrounded by an angry mob. Nick tried to assure them that he didn't do anything, but Judy cried harder. The zebra had her shielded from him, like he was a villain.

"Really. I'm an officer. I'm sure you just misunderstood something," He tried, starting to panic. The only other time this happened

Judy stood up, wiped away tears convincingly, and ran off. She left her bag though, but when Nick went to pick it up, he was pushed back.

"What? A thief now too? You're a disgrace, parading around like you're a real cop," An antelope sneered.

Fearing for his life now, Nick backed out of the crowd with his paws raised in the air. As soon as the sidewalk was empty enough to run without crushing any innocent rodents, he ran off at a full tilt.

He backed cautiously into an alley and pressed his back against the cold, hard brick. He was panting heavily, and he didn't want to look back.

Judy flipped herself around the corner of the wall and skipped up to him.

"So. Last place where Emmet was?" Her eyes were bright and she was smiling, as if nothing had ever happened.

"Okay. What are you helping me?" He exploded. "If you hate me enough to sic an angry mob on me, why would you ever help me?"

She batted her eyelashes coyly. "Aww. Poor little fox, coming out of your little fox empire, so tough you were born in the gutters and crawled out of the canals? Think you're so protected in the happy-go-lucky city of Zootopia, where 'anyone can be anything?'" She laughed. "Only, to find, whoopsie, not everyone gets along, prey are treated weak, predators are treated viciously, and crime runs rampant beyond the tips of your teensy-weensy little claws?"

She leaned closer to him, and in that moment, for her small height and farm garb, she seemed tall, looming over the terrified fox.

"I have nothing against you for the moment, Slick. But here's the thing. I'm a businesswoman. No more, no less. You need help, and I need something from you. So let's just continue on our merry way, and then we part ways as unlikely friends after we both get what we want. Sound good?" Her voice had suddenly turned dark, and it scared him how anyone could have two sides to them and just switch back and forth at will.

Nick glanced around nervously. Judy's paw was outstretched, waiting for a handshake. He hated this. Too many deals, too many promises. Everyone around him was thinking seven steps ahead, and he was just a pawn.

Still, he shook her paw. He wanted the lead. No. He _needed _the lead.

"You forgot your bag," He added stupidly.

She waved it away. "Lose them everywhere. Not a big deal."

He hated relying on her like this, and he dreaded to think what she wanted from him, but it's the best thing he has at the moment.

He just hoped it wouldn't cost him more than it already has.

6. Chapter 5

She led him down winding roads and dark alleys, past restaurants, marketplaces, and, he will later swear, past several district lines, but eventually, they ended up at a dump.

Like, a literal dump.

The ripe stench of garbage flooded Nick's nose. He coughed and waved his paw in front of his muzzle, but it didn't clear up. Judy seemed to _like _seeing him uncomfortable, but it was obvious she hated the smell too.

"Beware of traps," She called, and bounded ahead swiftly.

"Hey!" He yelled, and raced after her, but his foot tripped on something, and he went sprawling onto the moist dirt ground.

"Whaaa â€“" Before he knew it, he was being dragged into the air,

hanging by one foot on a rope. His tie smacked him in the face and his sunglasses fell to the ground with a dull clatter.

Judy giggled softly before stifling it immediately.

A huge bang sounded from an old, beat-down truck, the sound tortured metal makes when it's struck.

Nick began pivoting slowly by the rope. All he could see were leaves. He groaned in annoyance.

"Who's there?" A deep, gruff voice shouted in a tone that suggested Nick's pelt better hide to be safe.

He stole a glance at Judy, but she didn't seem particularly fazed. She had on a small, contented smile, as if everything was under her control, and everything was going just the way it's supposed to.

He tried to twist around to see _anything, _but his other foot caught on a branch and he went plummeting down to the ground.

He rose up groggily to see â€"

â€" The smallest fox with the biggest ears ever.

And the sandy epitome of cuteness carried a baseball bat that could easily take off Nick's head.

Judy gently pushed the tip of the baseball bat down with that same contented grin on her face.

The little fox lowered his sunglasses an inch to get a good look at her.

She waved.

Nick tried to stand up and immediately started toppling over. He steadied himself against the same tree that he was tied up on and fell into a pit.

"Who are you two supposed to be?" The tiny fox questioned. He looked back and forth between Nick and Judy. "Some kind of performing troop?"

"Tsk, Finnick. You should've recognized me," She replied haughtily, tapping the small fox on the nose.

He swung the baseball bat in a wide, speeding arc that left a shrill _zip_, but Judy simply plucked it out of air effortlessly and rested it over her shoulder.

"You touch me again, I bite your _face _off," He snarled. Sunlight glinted off his sunglasses and into Judy's eyes.

Nick climbed out of the pit, completely exhausted, and got hit in the head with a pinecone.

"Finnick, fennec fox of Sahara Square," Judy said, as if reciting a list, "but we both know that's not your real name, is it?"

Nick looked up at her with newfound interest. A third side of her. Scratch cute, mean, and smart off that list.

Finnick turned a furious shade of red and snapped his tail. "And who are you?"

"Judy Hopps, of Bunnyburrow. You might have heard of the Hopps farms?" She said, giving him the same line she gave Nick. When she stuck out her paw to shake, though, the tiny fox was gaping at her.

He began backing up slowly, his eyes scouring the ground for something sharp or hard to defend himself with, glancing warily at the baseball bat he'd stupidly let her steal.

"Look," He began, "Hopps, I already told Mr. B, if he wants to tussle, he stops sending others to do his dirty work." His paw hooked onto a sharp piece of scrap metal and he hoisted it in front of himself like a knife, even though he hadn't the faintest idea how to use one.

"Relax, relax. I'm not here for Big. I just need a favor." She propped Nick up just before he was going to walk straight into a jagged spike. "A really simple favour."

Finnick held his paw out and Judy deposited the baseball bat in it.

"And what makes me think I can trust you?"

She chuckled awkwardly. "Well, I know I messed your place up pretty bad a couple times, and you ended up in the hospital more than once" "

"Let's not forget that time you left me for dead at the bank!"

"â€" that too, but hey, we're friends, right? What happens on the job, stays on the job."

Finnick huffed.

Judy's eyes glazed over with fury. "Okay. I tried this the easy way. This isn't a request. I need information. NOW." Her paw tightened around her belt, and Nick saw a pair of brass knuckles. She crouched lower in an expert stance, ready to fight.

Nick saw the look of sudden fear in the little fox's eyes. _He's that scared of Judy?_

"Okay! Okay!" He cried, holding his paw out in front of him in surrender.

Judy's scowl turned into a smirk. "About a week ago, Emmet Otterton came here for his _meeting_. Where did he go?" She asked.

C'mon. You have to buy this. I just need to hold out a little longer, and the heat's off me.

"Otterton," Finnick deadpanned. "He left in a car. 29THD03. It's Mr. B's private â€" "

Judy slapped her paw over Finnick's mouth. "Yeah, that's great, yay! We have the license plate! Thanks, I'll get out of your fur, now, come on, let's get out of here," She said hurriedly and dragged Nick away. The groggy fox had just enough time to grab his sunglasses off the ground.

Who's Mr. B? He wondered idly. Should I be concerned? And why was that fox so scared of Judy?

The rabbit was deceptively strong, and when he finally regained his bearings, they were outside the dump. He jumped up indignantly and dusted himself off.

"So, you mind telling me what happened?" He asked.

"Otterton left in a car with license number 29THD03. That should be enough, right?" She bounced anxiously on her toes. "Seeing how any idiot can run a license plate!" She trailed off, waiting for him to finish the sentence.

The sudden realization hit him. "I can't! I'm not in the system yet! No resources, and that includes running plates!" He started muttering.

Judy pulled at her ears. "Let me guess. You need my help."

"Please?"

She sighed. "I have a friend at the DMV. Fastest guy I know."

He nodded. "Wait. How is this benefiting you in the slightest?" Nick thought to ask.

She laughed menacingly. "You'll see."

7. Chapter 6

For everyone that asked, I imagined this story as more of a "find your confidence/be who you are" story, not really of Judy corrupting Nick. I mean, you can continue letting your minds wander and keep giving me awesome ideas to expand this story with, but this was just to let you know what I imagine the main idea is.

**Special shoutout to **Elements King **for your splendid reviews, and to everyone else who PM'd me and reviewed but didn't get a reply yet.
>

Oh, and of course, all you followers and writers out there are awesome too!

Nick had splinters and branches stuck everywhere on him. He spent the entire way over to the DMV plucking them out of his fur. Judy just sighed and hopped along faster. The Sahara Central artificial sun was starting to dip below the horizon, and on the other side of the city, she could see the cool Tundratown sun rising.

When they got to the DMV, though, Nick was horrified to see that the line even stretched outside.

He seemed frozen in place, his tail bushed up and all his fur standing on end.

She nudged him gently. "C'mon, Slick! Flash is waiting! Time is ticking! Cities are falling as we speak!" She bounded up to the door, but turned back when he didn't follow. "Hello? You alive?"

He breathed rapidly. "Are you sure we shouldn't line up?" He stammered.

She rolled her eyes. "Geez, fox. Break the rules once in a while, will ya?"

She pushed past an elk at the door and strode inside.

"Excuse me, pardon me, sorry," Nick apologized, gingerly making his way inside to follow her.

The place was packed. In fact, it didn't seem like the line was going anywhere. In fact, all the clerks were very slow. Very, very slow.

"They're all sloths?" Nick asked incredulously, and immediately slapped a paw over his muzzle. Thankfully, no one heard.

Judy fluffed her tail. "Why? Can't sloths be fast?" She teased, and faced a sloth in a green shirt. "Flash, Flash, hundred yard dash! How are ya?"

The sloth blinked slowly. "Ju â€“ dy!... Iâ€| Amâ€| Doingâ€| Justâ€| As wellâ€| Asâ€| Iâ€| canâ€|"

Nick's eye twitched while Judy gave him a smug grin. He pressed hard on this phone screen, pretending he was anywhere but here.

"Hi. Sorry to bother you today. Officer Wilde, ZPD. Can you run a plate for me?" He gave a forced smile and hoped the sloth wouldn't talk again.

"Sureâ€| Whatâ€| Isâ€| Theâ€| Plateâ€|"

"Number? 29THD03," Nick interrupted.

"Numberâ€| Officerâ€| Wolf?"

"Wilde. 29THD03."

"Sorryâ€| My badâ€| Officerâ€| Wilde. Nowâ€| Whatâ€| Isâ€| Theâ€|"

"PLATE. NUMBER. Yes? 29THD03. PLEASE."

"Plateâ€|"

Nick chewed on his paw. Judy could barely stifle her laughter, but inside, she wished Flash would go faster too. C'mon, c'mon. Just solve this case already and tell the world! That's all I need. That's

all _we _need._

"Numberâ€|" "

Nick paused. The sloth was done talking.

"29THD03," He said as calmly as he could.

Flash tapped on his screen. "2â€| 9â€| Tâ€| H! Dâ€| 0â€| 3â€| "

The tiny slip rolled itself out excruciatingly slowly. Nick's eye was really twitching now, but there was little he could do to stop it.

Nick really wanted to grab the slip as soon as the paper slipped out, but forced himself to wait politely as Flash tore it off for him and passed it over.

He practically attacked the sloth to get it and read it over in a heartbeat. "Tundratown! Got it! Thank you, Flash!" He called out, already racing out the door, ignoring the annoyed sighs of mammals all around him who were still waiting. "Hope I never get a car," He muttered under his breath, careful no one heard.

The sky was pitch black outside, save for the lights on at the Lotus Casino across the district. He skidded to a stop once he was at a safe distance away from that huge crowd and looked around for Judy. He nearly jumped out of his pelt when she appeared in front of him.

He looked down awkwardly at the little slip of paper in his paws. "So. Thanks for helping me, I really appreciate it." He shuffled his feet.

"Oh? But I thought you were going to do me a little favour," She said innocently.

"Wait, what?"

She snapped something cool and hard over Nick's neck, and a burst of electricity flooded over him. Blinding white pain shot through his body, and suddenly, he was on the ground. Black specks swam at the edge of his vision, and his muscles were trembling.

He couldn't speak. His tongue wouldn't work. His head felt like it was stuffed full of oily cotton.

Judy leaned over him. She felt a twinge of sympathy, but quickly forced it away. "Hmm. I think that was too strong." She adjusted a dial on her remote control. Nick fell again as feedback shrieked into his ears.

He panted heavily. Every breath was painful, like fire searing his lungs.

"So, I need little favour. An errand, you might say, that I don't want to run alone. I'd love it if a big, strong, handsome fox were there to help me," Judy cooed, batting her eyelashes. Nick tried to focus on her, but his eyes wouldn't cooperate, and his gaze dropped down to the ground.

She gave him some time to regain consciousness. Suddenly, he pounced at her, but the collar set out a shrill alarm and he fell to the ground again, the tip of his fur singed.

"Oh, did I forget to tell you? No negative emotions, Slick. Don't want to set off the collar." Even as she said this, what she'd been planning to say since the morning, the script she's mulled over hundreds of times, it feltâ€¦ wrong. She felt no pleasure from bringing down this predator. And why don't I? He's one of them. Predators have wronged me and others so many times. He deserves this.

And yetâ€¦ She didn't feel happy. If anything, she felt sickened. She quashed the feeling, but it still settled like a stubborn weight on her heart.

He's mostly settled down now, so Judy erased the sadness from her face and resumed her smug-peppy look. "All I need is Officer Wilde. Not much more. Just your image. 'kay? Just picking up something that's owed to me. Does that sound fine?"

Nick smiled and nodded, but it was obvious that he was still distressed. His claws were out, and one ear was bent. She turned away so she wouldn't have to look at that collar anymore.

Just a little longer, Judy, she promised herself. One more step, and you'll get everything you've ever wanted.

So close now. So close.

End
file.